

On mergers and non-mergers in some southeastern Dutch dialects

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In Standard Dutch and the western Dutch dialects, West Germanic *i* in open syllables has merged with West Germanic *e* in open syllables and with (primary) umlaut of West Germanic *a* in the same condition, e.g. *zeker* 'sure' (< WGm. \bar{i}), *leven* 'life' (< WGm. \bar{e}), *ezel* 'donkey' (< WGm. \bar{a}^1). According to the *Phonological Atlas of Dutch Dialects* (Vol. II, pp. 55), there has also been a merger of WGm. *i* in open syllables and the primary umlaut of WGm. *a* (but not WGm. *e*) in open syllables in the eastern Dutch dialects. In general, WGm. \bar{i} and \bar{a}^1 have a more closed, [e:] -like sound in contrast to a more open [ɛ:] for WGm. \bar{e} (ibid., pp. 45).

However, it seems to have remained unnoticed in the prevailing literature that this does not hold true for a small area in the vicinity of Tongeren in the Limburgian dialects, in which WGm. \bar{i} , \bar{e} and \bar{a}^1 did not merge and are realized all three differently, e.g. Hoeselts [ze:kər] 'sure', [lɛ:və] 'life' and [ɛzəl] 'donkey'. This peculiarity shows a remarkable parallelism in the distribution of West Germanic *o* and *u* in open syllables, which did not merge either: in exactly the same area WGm. \bar{o} developed like WGm. \bar{a}^1 to a rising diphthong ([ʊɔ], [ɛ]), whereas WGm. \bar{u} and \bar{i} became long monophthongs ([o:], [e:]). It will be shown that this is not just a mere coincidence and moreover that the development of the West Germanic diphthongs *ai* and *au* probably also plays a role in the non-merger of WGm. \bar{i} and \bar{a}^1 (or \bar{o} and \bar{u}) in these southeastern Dutch dialects.